

Gibraltar and Morocco, 1979

By W. J. TENNENT*

I intended to fly to Gibraltar during the early hours of the 23rd of June but, due to high winds on the rock during which the aircraft was unable to land, I didn't leave England until lunchtime the following day, arriving at Gibraltar in the late afternoon.

The following day I was driven to the top of a scenic walk down a steep slope on the Eastern side of the rock known as the Mediterranean steps. Neither butterflies nor flowering plants were plentiful, with most of the former well past their best. One or two *Papilio machaon* were sailing around the summit and a fair number of *Gonepteryx cleopatra europaea* careered up and down the slopes. Also near the top I found a few very worn specimens of *Strymonidia spini* and *Lasiommata megera*. Further down the slopes were small numbers of male *Pseudotergumia fidia* in good condition but very difficult to approach without disturbing them as they rested on the stony path. The 'steps' end in a small wooded area near the Gibraltar Security Police post where I found a few *Pararge aegeria* of the nominate form and further down, almost in the town, one or two *Muschampia proto* and a fresh pair of *Celastrina argiolus*.

I did no collecting during the next two days, due in part to the presence of the 'levante', a mist which obscures the sun and the top of the rock, making it very cool and partly because I was engaged in hiring a car, obtaining insurance and provisions for going to Morocco. On previous collecting trips in Europe I have always had an estate car in which I can sleep, thereby being able to take a large amount of equipment. However, as it was short notice and because of the prohibitive cost of hiring a larger vehicle, I was eventually supplied with a Fiat 127 hatchback, barely large enough to accommodate my 6'2" frame curled up in the back and the reason for a series of fitful nights sleep to follow.

I spent the morning of the 28th of June on the Mediterranean steps once more but found little worthy of note and added no further species to those I had previously seen other than *Lampides boeticus*. The following day I left Gibraltar on the Mons Calpi car ferry for Tangier, arriving shortly after dark and decided to drive as far as I could that night towards my first destination; Ifrane in the Middle Atlas. I was obliged to stop due to tiredness about half past three in the morning a few miles south of Meknes. When I arrived at Ifrane later that morning the weather was cool and misty. I found a likely looking collecting spot on a gentle slope below the cedar forests above the town and decided to wait there in the hope that the weather got better. I had been warned not to leave my car unattended due to the risk of pilfering and when I asked the owner of a large house if I might park the car in his courtyard, he willingly agreed.

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The sun came out at mid-day and butterflies soon began to appear. *Pandoriana pandora* was in abundance and very fresh, without exception the females bear the usual silver markings on the hindwing underside whereas in the males, these markings are vestigial or absent. *Lysandra punctifera* was present in small numbers, mostly in very poor condition although I managed to take several males and two females in perfect condition. Of the females, the ground colour of one is chocolate brown with very few blue scales on the upperside and the other is as bright blue as the males. *Aporia crataegi*, *Gonepteryx cleopatra cleopatra*, *Pieris rapae*, *Polyommatus icarus*, *Lycaena phlaeas*, *Thymelicus sylvestris* form *syriacus*, *Spialia sertorius ali* and *Aricia cramera* were all plentiful. I took a striking female aberration of *A. cramera* with all the white markings on the underside replaced by a coffee brown, only slighter paler than the ground colour.

I noticed some pale brown hairstreaks flying around the lower branches of trees near some houses which I found to be *Nordmannia esculi mauretanicus* in fair condition. Unfortunately a dirty white mongrel dog took exception to my presence and embarked on a series of unprovoked attacks, apparently intent on sampling Englishman's flesh. I found that if I pretended to throw a missile at it and made plenty of noise, it would slide to a halt and retire to build up energy for a further attack. However, it soon realised that I had nothing to throw and came progressively closer before being discouraged. I took three male and four female *N. esculi* before the dog won and I moved on.

It was late afternoon before I found the official camp site and booked in. At the end of the site was a deep gulley with a stream and a flowery bank on one side. Here many of the butterflies seen earlier on the other side of the town were to be found in much larger numbers and with the addition of *Colias croceus*, *Maniola jurtina*, *Melanargia galathea lucasi* and a pair of *Fabriciana adippe auresiana*.

The following morning (1st July) I returned to my haunt of the previous day, parked my car in the forecourt and was met by the owner of the house who, having witnessed my antics with the net the day before, was obviously of the opinion that I would be better hospitalised then allowed to roam freely in the sun. Having shown him the set specimens on boards my sanity became satisfactorily established and I accepted his invitation to breakfast with him and his family. His wife produced brown bread, a saucer of local honey, crescent shaped almond sweetmeats, a disgusting looking mixture of bran and sugar (which nevertheless tasted very nice) and the inevitable mint tea. I produced packets of English cigarettes which were gratefully received and left, followed by two of the younger children of the household wielding tennis rackets which they used to swat any butterfly which came within their eager reach. *P. pandora* was more numerous than on the previous day, as was *P. icarus* and *A. cramera*. I saw a

few *Melitaea didyma occidentalis* in the sparse grass near the road, mostly rather worn and a single *Euphydryas aurinia beckeri*, also well past it's best. I caught a few *Hipparchia*, two male *Hyponephele lupina mauretanic*a and a single *Carcharodus lavatherae*.

In the afternoon the sky was overcast and I climbed high into the cedar forest where I was rewarded with a single *Nymphalis polychloros erythomelas*, the only specimen of this very dark red local race I saw. It was sitting with wings closed on a dark rock and I would have missed it but for the fact that I stopped for a short rest. It refused to fly, even when I put the net over it and nudged it gently and I had to lift it carefully with forceps. There were very few butterflies in the forest, one or two *L. megera* were to be seen and *Issoria lathonia* flew swiftly along the woodland rides. In the clearings were small numbers of *P. pandora* and *A. crataegi*. When I returned to the car I was shown a cardboard box containing the 'bag' of the 'tennis racket brigade' which included to my surprise a single, very battered *Iphiclides feisthamelii* and a female *H. lupina*, neither of which I had seen. An hour in the gorge back at the camp site produced *Vanessa cardui* and a female *Philotes abencerragus* which, judging from it's fresh condition, was a forerunner of a second generation.

On the 2nd of July I drove to Annoceur in the hope of obtaining *Coenonympha vaucheri* but the day was again overcast and little was flying on the barren slopes other than a few *Chazara briseis*, a single female *H. lupina*, *C. lavatherae* and a few *M. jurtina* together with *M. galathea* in the grass at the road side. Likely looking places yielded nothing even during the brief periods when the sun shone through. On my way back to Ifrane I stopped at various altitudes on the Tizi-n-Tretten and Djebel Hebri where I took a female *Hyponephele maroccana nivellei* at 1750 metres and three males at 1800 metres. A cold wind sprang up and the only lepidoptera apparently willing to brave this weather were several Humming bird hawk moths; *Macroglossum stellatarum*.

I spent the following morning near the cedar forests and in the afternoon found a large sheltered field with long grass where *Mesoacidalia aglaja lyauteyi* and *T. sylvestris* were in abundance. Later that evening I decided that owing to the inclement weather which showed no signs of getting much better and due also to the revolting smells emanating from the camp site latrines, I would move on. I left Ifrane about eight o'clock that evening, having set the days catch and drove until four o'clock the following morning when, because of a very heavy mist which made driving almost impossible, I stopped between Marrakesh and Oukaïmeden in the High Atlas. It was still misty when I awoke five hours later although it cleared slowly as my journey continued. However, at high levels the fog was dense and I stopped late that morning on a sharp bend on the road to Oukaïmeden, which afforded a parking space and where a stream flowed under the road.

There was considerable vegetation in this area and I collected here for the remainder of the day around 1700 metres. The sun didn't show itself at all but I soon found a wealth of butterflies including large numbers of *Pyronia cecelia*. Higher up the mountain side *Hyponephele maroccana* was common but most were males, flying with *Coenonympha dorus fettigii* on the stony slopes. I also took a single male *Plebicula amanda abdelaziz* and a female *Heodes alciphron* in it's very large form *herculeanus* which was resting on the outer fringe of a tall broom brush. I was surprised to see this latter species in good condition as it was late in the season but a careful search of similar bushes yielded a further seven females, four in perfect condition. No males were seen. Although it remained overcast it became warmer and back near the road *P. amanda*, *P. icarus* and *Aricia artaxerxes montensis* were flying with small numbers of *Coenonympha pamphilus*, *Thymelicus hanza* and *T. sylvestris*. A pair of *Celastrina argiolus* and two *C. briseis* completed the collecting that day and I drove up through the mist to Oukaimeden.

The next morning, 5th July, dawned overcast but by nine o'clock the sun was up. This was to be the hottest day of my stay in Morocco and I was lucky to be able to collect in such beautiful surroundings. Butterflies were numerous on the flowery slopes, reminiscent of the central European Alps and a climb to the highest convenient point at 2650 metres provided breathtaking views of the distant red mountains and gorges towards the Toubkal Massif. A large brown butterfly which was very difficult to approach proved to be *Berberia abdelkader* and later in the morning, when the sun became really hot, it flew commonly on the steep grass slopes. *P. icarus*, *P. amanda*, *C. croceus*, *P. daplidice*, *M. galathea* and *M. didyma* were common. An extremely worn *Pyrgus alveus numidas* was added to the list as were *Pyrgus amoricus maroccanus* and *Thymelicus lineola semicolon* and I took a series of *Cyaniris semiargus maroccana*, being unaware at that time that a female form with an upperside blue basal flush existed. Further down the mountain I found a stream where the males of several *Lycaenid* species were gathered in enormous numbers. They included *P. amanda*, *P. icarus*, *C. semiargus* and a few *Plebicula atlantica*, a singularly attractive member of the genus with pale lilac submarginal lunules on the male upperside hindwings. The broad orange border of the female upperside is very striking. Here also was *L. puncifera*, though generally in even worse condition than at Ifrane and a single *Melitaea aetherie algrica*, somewhat worn, was taken.

It took several hours that evening to set the day's catch and about ten o'clock I decided to move on to Amizmiz, a place I particularly wanted to visit. Once again I arrived in the middle of the night, having braved the narrow mountain roads which were in reality little more than rocky tracks totally unsuitable for transport other than mule or landrover

with the added hazard of literally hundreds of large toads. The following morning was very dull and the only addition of any interest was *Taracus theophrastus* found in small numbers resting in low thorn bushes, easily detected due to their distinctive black and white undersides. I then drove to Marrakesh and on towards Casablanca. I stopped a few miles North of Marrakesh to examine a fairly large patch of cultivated purple coloured vetch-like plants some distance from the road. The heat at this relatively low level was intense and although nothing was flying on the bare ground, this single patch of flowers yielded numbers of *P. rapae*, *P. daplidice*, *T. theophrastus*, *L. boeticus*, *Syntarucus pirithous*, *Zizeeria knysna* and *Azanus jesous*. I slept that night, 6th July, near Rabat and as the next day was very cold, I saw no butterflies. However, on the 8th of July I stopped between Asilah and Tangier and took *Coenonympha arcanioides* and several very fresh *I. feisthamelii* before catching the ferry to Gibraltar later that evening. I'm sure the customs official suspected me of smuggling drugs as he insisted on closely examining the cork ends of my setting boards, presumably looking for hidden compartments, before I was allowed on the ferry. The ferry arrived in Gibraltar about half past eight that evening and it was real pleasure to sleep in a roomy bed again.

I spent the 9th of July sightseeing and the following day I went on a day trip (without my net) to Madeek, east from Tangier. When I returned to the Mediterranean steps on the 11th and 12th of July I found that *P. fidia* was now numerous with the sexes in equal numbers and that *L. boeticus*, *S. pirithous*, *P. aegeria* and *M. proto* were all to be found in small numbers, but worn. I returned to England on the 13th July, well pleased with my collecting. My only regrets are firstly, that I saw no sign of *Anthocarie belia euphenoides* for which Gibraltar is the type location and secondly, that post-cards sent to the UK from Tangier have, due to their non arrival, cast serious doubts within my immediate family as to my integrity!!

Acknowledgments

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THE SILVER-BARRED: DELTOTE BANKIANA F. IN ESSEX.
— A single specimen of this uncommon moth came to light on the edge of the marsh near my home on 14th June 1980. Although it may have been a migrant, this is a very under-collected area and one wonders whether it might be breeding here. According to Firmin et al., *Guide to the Butterflies and Larger Moths of Essex* (1975), the species has been recorded only twice before from Essex. — J. B. FISHER, Beaumont House, Beaumont-cum-Moze, Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex.